

BUYING HELP

INTRODUCTION

If you don't know what type of product you need, or are wondering whether or not a particular product will work with your computer, then contact *Buying Help*.

If you want to buy a new desktop or notebook computer, please provide details of how much you want to spend and the type of tasks you want your new PC to perform.

If you're looking to buy an upgrade for your computer, you need to include as much information about your current system as possible. Knowing your computer make and model, processor, amount of memory and motherboard model can help us provide more accurate advice.

Tom Royal

Our Labs Editor can recommend the best product for your specific requirements.

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Do I need HSDPA?

Q I want to buy an ultra-portable notebook. I've noticed a few have HSDPA listed in their specifications. I think I understand what HSDPA is; it's essentially a faster version of 3G. But can only notebook computers equipped with HSDPA use this service, or could I add it to another notebook by installing an HSDPA data card? If the latter is true, what's the point of buying an HSDPA notebook in the first place?

I've also noticed that different notebooks have different expansion card slots. Some have full-sized slots and others have a smaller ExpressCard slot. Can you fit an ExpressCard into one of the larger slots?

Vishal Aggarwal

A High-speed download packet access (HSDPA) is one of many technologies commonly referred to as 3G. It allows you to connect to the internet at relatively high speeds when you're in an

area covered by a 3G mobile network. Notebooks with HSDPA built in have a SIM card slot, so by subscribing to a mobile phone tariff and plugging the card into your notebook you'll be able to connect to the internet without wires, wireless network coverage or any other adaptors.

You can add a 3G data card to almost any notebook sold without HSDPA support, but this will fill up an expansion slot or USB port. Most adaptors have an aerial that protrudes from the notebook, so it won't look as neat. Some 3G adaptors use another type of 3G data transmission, called UMTS, rather than HSDPA.

There are indeed several types of expansion slot found in notebooks. Some notebooks use the older CardBus standard. If you have a notebook with a CardBus slot, you can add 3G by buying Vodafone's 3G Datacard. Other notebooks use the newer ExpressCard standard, of which there are two versions. You can't plug an ExpressCard into a larger CardBus slot.

Disabling a wireless network

Q I want to buy an ADSL wireless modem router for my desktop and notebook PCs. The desktop computer will be connected to the router via an Ethernet cable, and the notebook will occasionally be connected wirelessly. When I'm not using my notebook, I'd like to turn off the router's wireless connection. Is there an ADSL wireless router with a button for this purpose?

Robert Adcock

A We don't know of any ADSL wireless modem routers with a switch that enables or disables the wireless network. Almost any wireless router will allow you to disable the wireless network using its web interface, but some routers forget the wireless network settings when you disable the wireless network. This can make re-enabling the network a drag, as you have to re-enter all your encryption details every time.



▲ The Thompson SpeedTouch 585 6 is our favourite wireless modem router

But really there's no need to disable the wireless network when you're not using it. As long as you secure your network using encryption, there's little chance of anyone else being able to use your internet connection. To save power, a more effective strategy would be to unplug the entire router when you're not using it. As it will be sitting next to your main PC, this shouldn't be too big a problem. Our favourite ADSL wireless modem router is the Thompson SpeedTouch 585 6, which costs around £58 including VAT.

Blocking noisy online ads

Q I used to use Norton Internet Security, which included a good advert-blocking tool. Unfortunately, last year I installed Internet Security on more than one of my computers and Symantec blocked my serial number, telling me I would have to send back my CD to be validated as an original disc. Since then I have been using McAfee's anti-virus and firewall software on my notebook computer and ZoneAlarm and AVG on my desktop computer, but neither includes tools to block adverts.

Not all advertising is bad; I find Google adverts almost as useful as its search results. But I hate ads with sound, such as the one that asks you to click on a fly to win an Xbox. These drive me insane when I'm trying to read webpages. Even instant messaging clients such as AIM and Windows Live Messenger carry annoying adverts, so I refuse to use them.

I feel as if I have tried every internet security suite on the market and every advert-blocking trick in the

book, but I can't seem to get away from adverts. Do you know a way to avoid this kind of rubbish? If not, perhaps people like me will be diagnosed with some kind of illness. I'd call it Crazy Frog disease, because I feel the urge to pull out my hair whenever I see these idiotic adverts.

Ben Shephard

A Adverts can be annoying, but there are plenty of easy ways to avoid them. One of the best is a free plugin for Firefox called Adblock, which you can download from <https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/10>. With Adblock installed, you can remove most adverts by right-clicking on them and selecting Adblock from the menu. This allows you to leave any you find useful. It also has a feature that obscures adverts made using Macromedia Flash. Unfortunately, there is no software, or even medicine, that can repair the psychologically damaging effects of viewing the Crazy Frog.

I need a number pad

Q I need to buy a new notebook computer. I'm an accountant, so I need one with a number pad the same as those found on a desktop PC keyboard. Unfortunately, they seem few and far between. I don't play computer games, so it needs only to run internet, office, payroll and taxation software. Can you suggest a suitable notebook? Price is irrelevant.

Jean Gadsby

A Most notebooks are designed to be small and portable. To keep width to a minimum, manufacturers use keyboards without a number pad. This isn't a problem when typing documents, but if you regularly use spreadsheet or finance software it can be a pain. Many notebooks allow you to use some of the letter keys as a numeric pad, but this makes switching between letters and numbers inconvenient. More annoyingly, the rows of letter keys aren't lined up straight, so if you're used to a normal number pad, typing numbers quickly is difficult.

Fortunately, many notebooks are now designed to be used on a desk. These don't



▲ Modern widescreen notebooks are large enough to include a proper number pad

need to be very portable, so many have large, widescreen displays. With a large display in the lid, they also have plenty of room for a large keyboard complete with a number pad. A good example is PC Nextday's Zoostorm 55-7701, which won a Best Buy award in *Labs, Shopper* January 2007. It's powerful and has a large widescreen display. It even has a TV tuner, so when you're not crunching numbers, you can use it to watch and record TV programmes.

Flash drive presentation

Q I currently show PowerPoint presentations using my notebook computer connected to a projector via a VGA cable. Life would be much simpler if I could save my presentations on to a flash drive and then plug this into a projector with a USB port. But are there any projectors that can do this?

John Agnew

A There are a few projectors that can do what you describe and Epson's EMP-1715 is one. It uses a technology that Epson calls EasyMP and comes with software for your PC. You can use this software to convert standard PowerPoint files into a format the projector understands. Copy this special file on to a standard USB flash drive. When presenting, you simply plug the drive into the back of the projector. For more information on how it works, you can view the projector's manual on the web at <http://tinyurl.com/y9fwrw>. The EMP-1715 costs around £1,250 including VAT.

Which motherboard do I need?

Q After reading your review of Powercolor's Radeon X1950 Pro graphics card (*What's New: Components, Shopper* February 2007), I've decided to buy one. Before I can fit it, though, I'll need to upgrade my PC. Having read *Shopper's* processor reviews, I've decided to add an Intel Core 2 Duo E6700 processor for excellent gaming performance. Can you advise me which motherboard I should use to maximise the performance I get from this processor and graphics card? In your recent Labs test (*Shopper* January 2007), you recommended MSI's P965 Platinum motherboard for LGA775 processors. Would this motherboard support the Powercolor X1950 Pro graphics card?

I am using a Sharp LL-T17A4-B monitor, which has an analogue input. Could I

continue to use this monitor with my upgraded PC system, or do I need to upgrade to a monitor with a DVI connection?

Allan McGall

A The Powercolor Radeon X1950 Pro graphics card is impressive, and you will need a powerful PC to make the most of it. If you're planning to seriously overhaul your computer before adding one, the Core 2 Duo E6700 is an excellent choice. It's powerful, and also good value. The MSI P965 Platinum motherboard is a perfect match, too. It supports Intel Core 2 Duo processors and has a PCI Express x16 slot for the Radeon X1950 graphics card. With three Best Buy components inside your computer, you will have a very powerful PC.

The Powercolor Radeon X1950 Pro has two DVI outputs, making it easy to connect to



▲ The MSI P965 Platinum is a good basis for a fast Core 2 processor and graphics card

monitors with a DVI input. This doesn't mean you have to throw out your existing display, though. A DVI-to-VGA adaptor is included in the box. Simply plug this in to the card's DVI output and connect your monitor's VGA cable to the other side.

How do I copy video to DVD?

Q I have some old VHS video tapes I want to copy to DVD. How do I connect my computer to an old VHS player that has only a SCART socket and a TV aerial output socket? I have a new Toshiba Equium A100-147 notebook with one PC Card slot and one ExpressCard slot. It runs Windows XP Media Center and uses an Intel Core Duo processor and Intel integrated graphics. I have Nero 7 Premium software to burn DVDs, but no TV tuner. Presumably I need to buy a PC card with a video input. Can you suggest a suitable product?

Tony Fisher

A There are video capture devices that plug into a PC Card slot, but the cheapest and simplest way to copy VHS video to a notebook computer is to use a USB TV tuner. We recommend the Terratec Cinergy Hybrid T USB XS. This can record a composite video input. You can buy an adaptor for around £15 that converts a SCART socket into composite video; search www.maplin.co.uk for the part code L50AJ.

The Cinergy Hybrid T USB XS comes with CyberLink MakeDVD software, so you can quickly convert video files into a DVD with a menu system. It costs around £68 including VAT. **CS**



◀ Terratec's Cinergy Hybrid T USB XS can record a composite video input